

PEOPLE & THINGS

By ATTICUS

IF, as seems likely, Herr Adenauer's visit to Moscow results in the establishment of diplomatic relations between West Germany and the Soviet Union, the first Russian Ambassador is likely to be Vladimir Semenov.

Semenov, now fifty-three, looks what he is: Russia's foremost German expert. He could be mistaken for a German professor or country doctor; but he has a wit and an ease of manner that are rare among post-war Soviet Ambassadors. These qualities he perfected under the tutorage of Madame Kollontay, probably the most gifted woman diplomat in history, with whom he worked for several years in the Soviet Embassy in Stockholm.

As an authority on German affairs, Semenov has a decade of first-hand experience behind him. Appointed adviser to Marshal Zhukov in Berlin in 1945, he was later appointed High Commissioner and Ambassador to the Eastern zone, and remained in Germany till the summer of last year.

Germans have a phrase for the urbanity which is Semenov's personal contribution to Russo-German relations. "Molotov and Gromyko are the vinegar in Soviet diplomacy," they say. "Semenov is the molasses."

Alcoholics Anonymous

TWENTY-ONE years ago, an American stockbroker who had just managed to survive the Wall Street crash found that nervous strain and heavy drinking had turned him into an apparently incurable alcoholic.

Then, with the aid of a fellow sufferer who was a doctor, he recovered, and the lessons learned by these two men—known in the history of alcoholism as "Bill" and "Bob"—led to the growth of the world-wide fellowship known as "Alcoholics Anonymous," whose members undertake to help each other to control the craving for alcohol. There are now about 150,000 members, of which 5,000 are members of the United Kingdom branch.

To mark the coming of age of the fellowship, a Congress opens today in St. Louis, and among the several hundred delegates (three of them from Britain) will be "Bill," the doyen.

Obsessive Allergy

THE secretary of the London branch, known as "Padge," tells me that the fellowship can boast 60 per cent. success in helping alcoholics to give up drink. He himself is a former alcoholic who never touches a drink now.

He tells me however than an alcoholic is never cured—in the sense that he can never hope to drink again, even in moderation. It must be total abstinence if he is not to suffer a relapse.

Alcoholism has recently been recognised as an illness—"a physical allergy coupled with a mental obsession," is Padge's description—and the stigma which formerly attached to the affliction is being gradually removed.

This has led to an increase in the number of women alcoholics who wish to join Alcoholics Anonymous. Formerly, women, who tend to drink in secret and to wish at all costs to conceal their drinking, were reluctant to confide in anyone; but now they, too, go to their doctors and are put in touch with the nearest "Anonymous" healer.

Man of the Day

TODAY is Mr. Bernard Berenson's ninetieth birthday. He is, of course, the world's foremost

authority on Italian art; but it is not for his attributions that his friends most prize him. What is irreplaceable about "B.B." is his perfected cosmopolitanism; and this is a quality which is best seen not in his printed works, valuable and numerous as these are, but in life.

It is, in fact, as a conversationalist that Mr. Berenson should be savoured; and it is as a conversationalist that he was captured, a month or two ago by his friend Mr. Derek Hill, the painter, in a photograph which I reproduce



"B.B."

here. ("An Englishman and a painter!", Mr. Berenson once said. "What a fate! There's only one good English painter, and even he had an Italian name.")

A photograph cannot, of course, give the tone of voice, the fugitive and unidentifiable accent, the sudden modulations into German or Italian or French. But this one does, I think, give something of the curiosity, the vigour, the independence of mind, and the impeccable sense of style which help to make Mr. Berenson's ninetieth birthday a matter for celebration.

The Viscount Calls

MANY visitors to Paris take kindly to Messrs. W. H. Smith's bookshop in the Rue de Rivoli—so perfectly does it counterfeit, in that stylish thoroughfare, the quiet and good manners of an English market town.

This congenial retreat is the scene, nearly every week in the year, of an incident which, in its small way, is an example of the Entente Cordiale in practice. Three o'clock strikes, and a small parcel, yielding in texture and ambiguous in shape, is punctually laid on the counter, and as punctually collected by a French gentleman of the highest distinction.

Should there be, exceptionally, some small delay, a message is relayed to the rear of the shop. "His Lordship," it runs, "is here for the tea leaves." And, within a moment, the week's leavings from "le fine-o'clock" are wrapped in waterproof paper and given and taken with scionorial courtesy.

An hour later the caller, the Vicomte de Noailles, feeds the tea leaves to his camellias and magnolias which are, I believe, the envy of the Ile de France.

Bard Sinister

No poet, in recent years, has done more to enrich our native balladry than Mr. William Plomer. Mr. Plomer has a genius for the

grotesque; and his admirers know that, beneath the smiling surface of his ballads, there often lurks some esoteric item of historical lore.

In his new poem, "The Heart of a King," which he read aloud last week at the Aldeburgh Festival, he has given sonorous currency to a rumour which, if true, will delight amateurs of *la petite histoire*.

Can it be true, as more than one Victorian and Edwardian memoir suggests, that the heart of Louis XIV is buried in Westminster Abbey? Mr. Plomer follows Augustus Hare and Lionel Tollemache in thinking it possible; but so macabre is the detail of the incident that the curious reader must turn to Mr. Plomer's next book of ballads for the answer.

Countries of the Mind

ONE of the season's most redoubtable books is the fourth volume (1938-53) of the London Library Subject Index.

Indispensable to the literary ferret, this enormous compilation displays the stalwart conservatism that has always marked the London Library. When privileged to glimpse the pronis I was glad to find that Mr. Nowell-Smith yields nothing to the former Librarians in his majestic indifference to fashion.

Korea is Korea to him, as it was to Carlyle, and the upstart Soviet Academy is firmly quoted as Imperatorskaya Akademiya Nauk. Novelties do occasionally get in: Annapurna, Cybernetics and Existentialism speak for the march of progress; and Space Travel has no counterpart in the earlier volumes—unless it be Floating Matter In The Air, which has a brisk run in 1909.

Analysts of the moral landslide will find matter for head-shaking in the disappearance of the heading Spiritual Wives; but others, perusing the 900 quarto pages, with their triple-columned, treble-checked entries, will agree with Desmond MacCarthy who once spoke of the Index as "a map to every country of the mind, which can be consulted at home by anybody, whether he is a member of the Library or not."

Head Beak

MRS. ROBIN DARWIN, the Principal of the Royal College of Art, is not, of course, an ordinary schoolmaster. His manner bespeaks the privateer, as much as the classroom; and in his handling of his spirited associates there is, I suspect, a touch of the master mariner, adroit in calm and squall alike.

This week there opens at Agnew's a large exhibition of Mr. Darwin's own pictures; and here, too, there are contradictions. For the Principal, so quick to seize upon talent in others, is slow, diffident and ruminative in respect of his own; great Sickert looks over his shoulder, and when he sits under the awnings of the Taverna Fenice it is Tissot, the prince of pictorial reporters, who whispers into his ear. Contradictions, certainly; but beguiling ones. Mr. Darwin aims to please, and I think he has succeeded.

Cut and Thrust

KHRUSHCHEV, I hear, had hardly arrived in Belgrade when he took Marshal Tito aside, told him how much he admired the cut of his uniforms, and asked him for the name of his tailor.

Confronted with the inspired cutter, Khrushchev produced a length of material that he had brought with him from Moscow.

"Can you," he said, "possibly get me a three-piece suit out of this length?"

"Certainly," said the tailor.

"How amazing!" said his new client. "In Moscow they told me there wasn't nearly enough."

"Your Excellency must not forget," said the tailor, "that in Russia you're a bigger man than you are here."